



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

Klaebe, Helen G. & Van Luyn, Ariella (2011) Imagining the city : using fiction to explore urban environments. In Galloway, Anne, Kraal, Ben J., & Tacchi, Jo A. (Eds.) *Ethnographic Fiction and Speculative Design Workshop*, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/49960/>

© Copyright 2011 Helen Klaebe and Ariella Van Luyn

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

Imagining the City: Using Fiction to Explore Urban Environments

Helen Klæbe and Ariella Van Luyn

Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Abstract

The paper will describe the ongoing project, *Imagining the City: Brisbane Short Story Competition*.

In 2010, as part of a study investigating urban planning and the gentrification of inner city landmarks, QUT researchers developed six personas to help inform the design of city apartments. Rather than view these personas as static, the authors solicited creative responses to promote further development. Submissions of short stories based on one of the persons, and set in Brisbane, were invited from the general public. Successful stories will be published in an online anthology and as an iPhone application.

The paper draws on ethnographic fiction theory to answer the question, how can research, specifically persona and use scenario, be transformed into fiction? The authors suggest that such creative responses in the form of fiction may be useful for urban designers.

Keywords: Ethnographic Fiction, Urban Spaces, Persona Development

Introduction

The study of literature from the perspective of geography—literary geography—has long been a tool of social scientists and geographers (Kitchin and Kneale 2001, Ridanpää 2007). The study of literary geography acknowledges that fiction can be a source of geographical data, and can capture representations of the urban environment. This project inverts this process instead of mining fiction for data, fiction is used as a means to transform data into new and innovative representations of the city. The paper will consider how qualitative research, specifically persona creation, can be transformed into fiction, by documenting the *Imagining the City Short Story Competition*, which emerged from an ARC grant (Australian Research Council Grant LP0882274, *Respecting the Past, Imagining the Future: Using Narrative and New Media in Community Engagement and Urban Planning*). The project is ongoing; some sections still require further investigation.

The paper first describes how the *Imagining the City Competition* fits within the overall framework of the *Respecting the Past, Imagining the Future* project. As part of this project, six personas were created to inform the design of inner city apartments. The authors then invited fictive responses to the personas. The paper goes on to document what we hope to achieve from this engagement; how we elicited creative responses; and how the short stories were judged. The winners will have an opportunity to participate in a workshop to edit their stories and create bonus content, which will be published in the form of an iPhone application. The final section of this paper offers an overview of how ethnographic fiction writers have engaged in the task of transforming research into fiction, in order to understand how writers might go about the task of transforming the personas into short stories.

Project design

Action research

Using ethnographic action research methods (Hearn, Tacchi, Foth, Lennie 2009), an interdisciplinary research team working on an ARC linkage grant *Respecting the Past, Imagining the Future: Using Narrative and New Media in Community Engagement and Urban Planning* designed a project consisting of three phases, each characterised by constant cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The aim of this project is to support new media creativity and literacy in communities and help people participate in the urban planning process, creating a sense of belonging and fostering human talent and socio-cultural values.

The table below summarizes each of the three project phases and locates the current discussion within the framework of the overall project:

Phase	Research and Plan	Implement	Observe	Reflect
One 2008-9	Identify target demographic and determine how they live in their apartment using census data.	Workshops with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apartment dwellers (renters/owners) Property investors 	Observe spatial use of rooms by using character analysis and applied drama methodology.	Identify recurring user types. Use creative writing techniques to develop personas.
Two 2009-10	Creative writers use workshop data to create six personas.	First writer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personality profiles on Facebook. Second writer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six short scenario designs 	Personas are gender- centric, but hybrid team identifies strongly with characters. Identify differing terms with shared	Fictional stories/scenarios could be developed using characters. The team develops a shared nomenclature.

			meanings.	
Three 2010-11	Devise mobile narrative platform and creative writing competition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications and Technology team create mobile application • Creative writing team undertake writing competition 	Competition closes June 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data to be analysed in C&T workshop • Final edits with authors (July) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application launched November 2011 • ARC linkage acquitted • Findings published by research team

phase one: gathering data.

In 2008, as part of a study investigating urban planning and the gentrification of inner city landmarks, QUT researchers developed six personas to help inform the design of city apartments. The personas are grounded in data gathered from a series of performance-based workshops that used creative character development activities (Foth, et. al., 2012). In late 2008, a series of focus groups, or ‘workshops,’ utilising character analysis and drama methodology were used to discover how the identified demographic lived in their apartments.

The developers had quantitative census data that revealed certain characteristics—such as age, income, education and family dynamics—of people living in the targeted inner city suburbs. However, the developers and researchers felt they needed to understand more deeply their target renters, owners and investors, so that the designers could think more innovatively about design, and differentiate their company’s product from other similar apartments being built in inner city Brisbane.

Through the workshops, researchers investigated how different demographics might inhabit the apartment, and thought about how, for example, a 25-year-old female nurse, who is renting for

the first time, might live in an apartment differently from a 55-year-old bachelor who owns his own apartment. Researchers found they were describing ‘types’ of people.

Researchers quickly discovered the need for a common language to describe their endeavors in the fields of narrative and design. While the developers talked in terms of demographics, researchers in the project used terms such as users and prototypes. The language used by fiction writers to describe their techniques—such as characterization and narrative—proved one way to bridge the gap between disciplines. For example, ‘persona,’ used in a design context, had similar connotations to the notion of ‘character’ in fiction. Both terms implied a creation of an entity who had no direct equivalent in the real world, but who seemed life-like, and who readers were encouraged to identify with (Grenville 1990, p.36). This raised questions about the possibility of engaging writers on a deeper level with the design process. Writers were invited to bring the characters to life, giving the types names and stories.

phase two: sharing language across disciplines.

Writing a back-story for characters is a common practice in creative writing. To begin the character development process the researchers created a Facebook page for each persona. Each investigator, whether an academic or industry partner, was asked to complete four personal profile pages based on the sales data from the developers:

- One entry level renter (\$350-400 a week)
- One investor (\$500-700k)
- One owner/occupier (\$500k-1m)
- One investor/potential occupier (over \$1m)

These were collated and shared because the researchers were looking for similarities and differences. Marcus Foth suggested researchers read *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charaktere*

(*Earwitness: Fifty Characters*) by Nobel Literary prizewinner Elias Canetti (English translation by Joachim Neugroschel in 1979). This work was given to a writer/researcher, along with the personal profiles and workshop data, with the task of developing six personas based on Canetti's technique. For example, the user archetype/persona of 'The Bachelor' was developed into a 'use scenario' (Foth et. al 2011) which demonstrates how the persona might move within the apartment. The use scenario for this persona includes:

The Bachelor won't tell you that he's successful and wealthy, but his goal is to exude exactly that.

The Bachelor is a walking advertisement for capitalism and there is no greater advertisement than his apartment.

Arriving home, the Bachelor dumps laptop, keys, and wallet on the coffee table, removes business clothes and pours a drink of aged scotch. Then he settles into the supple, L-shaped black leather lounge and turns on the flat screen dominating one wall, but pays more attention to checking emails on his phone.

Scenarios developed from the personas were usually two to three pages long and described how the personas lived in their apartments: their habits, needs and problems. Foth, Satchell, Bilandzic, Hearn and Shelton (2011) have described the development of personas in more depth elsewhere; it is not the purpose of this paper to focus on this aspect of the project. Rather, the development of the personas is described briefly in order to contextualise the *Imagining the City* short story competition.

phase three: animating the location-based stories

Some of the team's researchers had previously worked together in placed-based storytelling projects (Foth, Hearn and Klæbe, 2007), and saw mobile storytelling applications as a useful way of engaging the community in public 'spaces between places' in the city (Klæbe, Foth, Burgess, and

Bilandzic, 2007). As urban planners grapple with effective methods to stimulate social sustainability in the 'art of city making', through urban renewal or development projects, more are recognising that history and creativity can make great partners (Landry, 2007).

Researchers examined literary trail applications for creative writers (Wiesner, Foth and Bilandzic, 2009), which brought the application developers and writers together to build on previous theoretical research undertakings and produce a user/reader friendly e-book publication and an iPhone application. This aspect of the project is described in more detail later in the paper.

Expansion of personas through creative writing

In urban design and computing, there has been a shift towards using stories of everyday life in design processes. Galloway (2004, p. 385) notes that 'social and cultural theories of everyday life may begin to contribute to discussions of the design of ubiquitous computing.' Anderson et. al. (2006) encourage designers, as Galloway predicted, to open their 'minds to every facet of urban life.' Anderson et. al. (ibid) believe that some of the 'facets' missing from computing design were 'characters, lives and emotions.' In this context, narrative, i.e. 'a chain of events situated in place and time' (Lothe, 2000, p. 3), emerges as a way of communicating character and emotion. Certainly, narrative has become a means to engage communities in urban design processes, particularly through the use of personas and scenarios, as described above (Foth, Hearn, Klæbe, 2007, p. 3). Personas can inject personal, emotive detail into design considerations. However, they are a 'snapshot' (ibid). The short story can offer an extended form to explore persona development.

Short stories are, by implication, works of fiction. Fiction writing combines the narrative- and character-driven qualities of scenario and persona design, but differs from these forms in ways that may benefit designers and evoke new perceptions of the urban environment. Galloway et. al. (2003, p.1), for example, use the notion of 'the invisible city,' present in Italo Calvino's novel

Invisible Cities (1974), to both understand how travelers first experience the city, and to inform the design of interactive experiences. Calvino (1974) writes that travelers first visiting the city can see its shape, but to those who have lived there for a long, the city has become invisible. Responses such as Galloway's rely on the assumption that although fiction is, by definition, writing where imagination has intervened, and the author has moved beyond the expectation to depict actual and verifiable people, events and issues (Ricketson, 2010, p. 3; Hoffman and Murphy, 2007, p. 9), fiction can still offer a kind of truth. In this case, fiction can reveal how people may interact in urban environments. The study of imaginative geographies is also based on the idea that imagined images of place 'make a difference, that is to say they are real' (Driver, 1999, p. 210). Similarly Gibson (2005) suggests writers can fill in the absences of place, intuitively learned through going over 'real' routines and data. He (ibid) believes a good historian can apply imagination to historical evidence, but writers must sit between the creative writer, the historian and the fictional writer to write about people and place, because there is often a great deal of 'stuff' missing, using non fiction alone.

This project works with a similar assumption; it encourages imaginative responses to personas in order to develop both the representations of the personas and the city they inhabit.

In encouraging fictional responses, we invite changes in the way Brisbane is viewed by its inhabitants. Fiction has the capacity to shape perception, particularly through the technique of defamiliarisation. Rob Kitchin and James Kneale (2001, p. 24), for example, note that cyberfiction, a sub-genre of science fiction, has 'significantly shaped media and academic narratives concerning information and communication technologies.' Kitchin and Kneale (2001, p. 21) argue that cyberfiction is distinctive because the writing is permeated by a quality of estrangement or being out-of-place. Estrangement, defamiliarisation or foregrounding is the quality of fiction that makes 'the invisible visible, the unconscious conscious' (Mukarovsky, n.d, p. 2). We are reminded of Italo

Calvino's notion of the invisible city, but in reverse: fiction writing could serve to make the city visible again. Other qualities of fiction could also be useful in exploring how people can interact in the city.

Fiction relies heavily on conflict or complications to drive action and character development. Generally, stories move from a stable beginning, through complications and rising action to another point of equilibrium at the end (Wallace and Martin, 1986, p. 81; Brady, 2010, p. 16). Persona and scenario design, on the other hand, tend to offer ideal situations. Personas rarely, if ever, fail to engage with the design question at hand; in a use scenario a persona would never feel so dissatisfied they'd walk out of the apartment never to return. Fiction allows this very real possibility. In persona or scenario design, the external world is a place of stimulation and excitement, rather than a source of conflict, confusion or fear. While these depictions offer one possibility for interaction, other experiences are overlooked. In fiction, conflict is encouraged, allowing representations of interaction that are playful or subversive. Fiction's purpose is to unsettle the reader; 'conflict exists to generate conflict within the reader' (Brady, 2010, p. 15). We would argue that representations of conflict can develop our understanding of the possibilities of interactions within the city.

Conflict-driven narrative is also a means to develop character. Events, after all, require some agency of action, i.e. character (Cohan and Shires, 1988, p. 69). A sense of narrative is created through transition, a sense that characters have moved from one state to another (Lothe, 2000, p. 3). In fiction, conflict serves as a means to 'test' characters, revealing their characteristics through action rather than description. A commonplace piece of writing advice is 'show, don't tell.' It is through depicting characters interacting in scenes, engaging in dialogue and encountering difficulties that fiction tells a story. Conflict should change a character. This is what is described as a 'character arc.' The personas described in the use scenarios are static; they don't change. Fiction can

offer a way for the personas to be dynamic, changing beings, which more closely reflect how citizens might feel and respond in urban environments.

We envision that good fiction writers, when writing a story based on a persona, would use conflict to create a sense of defamiliarisation and develop characters. The authors invited submissions of short stories in the hope of promoting a dynamic, nuanced depiction of the idealised personas living in an urban environment. We imagined that writers of fiction would be more playful and subversive when telling stories about the city.

Inviting submissions

The competition was open to the public, although Queensland University of Technology (QUT) creative writing students were targeted in particular; students could submit their short story as an alternative assessment item in a creative writing subject. The competition was also advertised through the Queensland Writers Centre, the Queensland Writers Marketplace and the authors' own networks.

However, before inviting responses, the authors made a number of changes to the descriptions of the personas. The first of these was to change 'persona' to 'character.' This decision was made because, although we were aware of the similarities of concept, we were encouraging fictional responses and it seemed appropriate to use language associated with fiction rather than design; this change did not substantially alter the concept of a person-like creation described on page 6. However, we did alter a number of other aspects of the personas. Most significantly, we removed any gender, race or class identifiers from the descriptions. For example, 'The Bachelor' became 'The Singleton.' We felt that such details, while useful in understanding the demographic of apartment dwellers in the early stages of the project, might actually limit the variety of fictional depictions. Race, class and gender can often be a source of conflict—which, as described earlier, is a

key element when developing character—and to limit the characters to a homogenous type would reduce the opportunity for writers to generate narratives driven by these tensions.

Some of the persona-based scenarios were up to three pages long. We felt that too much detail might discourage the casual reader from participating and limit the generation of imaginative responses. We cut the descriptions down to a page, which raised questions about what should be included and what should be deleted. After some discussion, and imagining how we might respond to the task ourselves (both authors are creative writers), we decided to keep details likely to produce conflict. For example, the description of the gardener's plants dripping on their neighbour's balcony was kept because it was likely to generate stories about interactions with neighbours. The descriptions of the characters were put together in an information pack for potential entrants and published on the internet.ⁱ

In the information pack, we encouraged writers to imagine how one of the six characters might inhabit the city of Brisbane. Not only did stories have to be based on one of the characters, they also had to be set within a five kilometer radius of Brisbane's Central Business District (CBD). In the information pack, we encouraged potential entrants to consider how:

Fiction allows readers to relate to place in new and nuanced ways. Authors such as Peter Carey, David Malouf, Venero Armano, Nick Earles, Krissy Kneen, and Rhys McAllister have shaped the way readers connect with, and imagine, Brisbane.

We alerted entrants to the rapid changes in the urban landscape, changes which the ARC project itself was grappling with:

Brisbane is a rapidly growing city. Spaces once associated with industry or recreation are being redeveloped into residential apartments or small housing blocks, particularly those in close proximity to the CBD...In the wake of such changes, how will representations of

Brisbane evolve? Will the traditional images of jacaranda-lined streets and tin-roofed Queenslanders, with a mango tree and hills hoist in the backyard, make way for something else?

In these ways we directed entrants, although not explicitly, to engage with changes in the urban environment and to move beyond traditional depictions of Brisbane in fiction. Because we were so prescriptive in these aspects, we welcomed submissions of any genre, which could be set in the past, present or future.

To our knowledge, there is no other competition in Australia that asks entrants to respond to characters that have already been developed. It was expected that some entrants might find this task perplexing. Van Luyn drew on her experiences teaching first year creative writing students to fashion some guidelines. We encouraged entrants to:

- Use the short story form to develop their chosen character, giving them a name, a voice, a back-story and a narrative;
- Consider how their representation of Brisbane reflects changes in the city; and,
- Be creative in how they respond to the character descriptions, allowing them to inspire rather than restrict.

In this way, we hoped entrants would find the task of responding to the characters an opportunity to both re-imagine Brisbane and write within a set of restrictions useful for the design industry.

Judging the Stories: Criteria for Winning Entries

In theory, there will be six winners of the competition: one per character. In practice, this means the stories will be judged against other stories about the same character, rather than the whole pool of entries, and that in some cases, there will only be one entry for a character. Rather than let that entry

automatically win, we developed a set of criteria to determine the quality of entries. The criteria were based both on our experiences as writers and writing teachers, and a consideration of our aims in soliciting stories.

The authors developed a set of criteria that was sent to the three judges to assist with the selection process. It is worth reproducing here because it demonstrates what the authors consider to be a successful short story given the task's restrictions:

- Character development:

How successfully has the author represented and developed the chosen character?

Is the character convincing and well rounded?

- Depiction of place:

Is the depiction of place engaging, believable and original?

Is the depiction of place integrated with other elements of the story to explore a theme or idea?

- Theme:

Does the story explore a theme or idea with imagination and insight?

Do all the elements of the story work cohesively to express the theme or idea?

- Narrative:

How well does the story use narrative and conflict to develop character and explore theme?

- Voice (the author's choices about how words and sentences are arranged; writing style):

How convincing, original and engaging is the voice of the story?

Does the voice work cohesively with other elements of the story?

The first two criteria relate to the restrictions of the task (the choice of character and the representation of Brisbane's CBD) but also incorporate more 'writerly' expectations about believability of the characters and the task of fiction in exploring particular ideas and themes. Conflict is an integral part of character development, as identified earlier (p. 10), so the criterion of 'narrative' focuses chiefly on this element, but elements such as pace (how fast or slow a story moves) and tension would also be taken into consideration as parts of narrative. The voice criterion relies partly on the ambiguous qualities of engagement and originality, and may differ from judge to judge. All categories are judged based on the idea that every element, i.e. character, theme, setting/place, narrative and voice, work together to create a unified whole; develop a particular mood and tone; and explore a theme in a nuanced and sophisticated manner. As Hilary Mantel (1993, p. 37) states, the elements of a book (or in this case a short story) are not separable. We knew the judges would be familiar with these creative writing techniques because all three, including the two authors, are from the creative writing faculty at QUT. We also acknowledge that judging is subjective. After reading the stories and marking them against the criteria, the judges will meet to discuss their choice of winners. This discussion will leave room for negotiation and debate.

Laurel Richardson (2005, p. 962) provides some useful evaluation criteria in her discussion of creative analytical practices in ethnography, which she defines as 'instances where the author has moved outside conventional scientific writing.' These criteria shed further light on the task of evaluating entries. Richardson (2005, p.963) states that creative analytical practices should have:

1. Substantive contribution: does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life?
Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Does this piece seem true or a credible account?
2. Aesthetic merit: does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex and not boring?
3. Reflexivity: how has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgements about the point of view?
4. Impact: Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions and move me to write?

The criteria developed by the authors predominantly speak to the categories of aesthetic merit and impact. Richardson's criteria are also useful because we acknowledge that the short stories in our competition will move beyond traditional expectations of fiction; the stories were grounded in qualitative data and therefore have the capacity to have an ethnographic or social scientific perspective. Richardson's third category of reflexivity is useful because, when the stories are presented as an iPhone app, they will be accompanied by bonus content that will reveal the author's subjective processes in creating the stories (see section on p. 14 for further discussion). All these techniques of craft will be further developed and explored in a workshop with the winning entrants.

Designing the workshop

In July 2011 the authors and other creative writing teachers and practitioners plan to facilitate a day-long workshop with the winners. The workshop is currently being developed. The authors hope that attending a workshop on Ethnographic Fiction at the Communities and Technologies Conference in June 2011 will give them further strategies for designing the workshop.

The workshop will have two purposes. First, the facilitators will work with the winners to edit their story. The facilitators' feedback will be guided by the criteria described on page 14. We will encourage writers to study their use of character, setting, theme, narrative and voice, and to consider how these elements work together to create a whole. The workshop will use one-on-one feedback sessions, writing exercises and discussion to develop the short stories.

The second purpose is to encourage writers to create 'bonus' content for the iPhone application. The bonus content will include audio, images and text. We will draw on Richardson's notion of reflexivity to guide this process, encouraging writers to tell stories about how they put their story together. We will ask them three questions (their answers will be recorded for later discussion) to help initiate this process:

How did you go about transforming the personas into a short story?

Did you visit the place where you set the story?

Did you draw on previous memories of that space to write the story - photographs, film, or news media?

Richardson (2005, p.965) describes the answers to these questions as 'writing stories,' and offers some suggestions for how to elicit them. Richardson (ibid) states that writing stories are 'narratives that situate one's own writing in other parts of one's life such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, politics, social movements and personal history.' She (ibid, p.975) encourages writing stories about 'how you happened to write the piece you wrote; about friendships; networks, memories, biographical experiences. What these stories do is situate your work in the context, tying [your writing] task to the ebbs and flows of your life and self.' We will encourage participants to use the interview questions as a foundation for their writing stories. Participants will then be given a few

weeks to finalise their short story and writing stories, which will form the bonus content for the iPhone app.

Designing the iPhone application

We hired Mark Bilandzic and Peter Lyle, PhD students at the Urban Informatics Research Labⁱⁱ to design and develop an iPhone application that allows users to read and navigate through location-based stories. We have had close to a dozen meetings and discussions on what the aim and goal of the application is and what features we wanted to include. Mark and Peter have sketched out early paper prototypes of the application illustrating how it would look on the iPhone at a later stage. We ran through some example stories and iteratively fine-tuned the functionality as well as user interface towards a fixed specification. The core functionality covered:

- book reader with an overview of all chapters as a list as well as on a map'
- audio playback capability;
- bonus content that is only available when the user is in-situ (i.e. close to a book chapter's geo-tag);
- visual feedback when bonus content is available in-situ (i.e. when the user enters a chapter's geo-tag zone).

The system architecture was designed in a way that all chapters and the bonus content are downloaded with the application, so the text can be accessed from anywhere, even when the user has no signal. An internal control mechanism only allows access to bonus content, when the user is in-situ. Bonus content can include an mp3-audio file of the author reading their work and any images or links that might be related, or that the author chooses to add. Content is still unclear as this will be developed in the workshop, but the parameters have been loosely set by the application's content container. Figure 1 shows some screenshots of an example chapter.

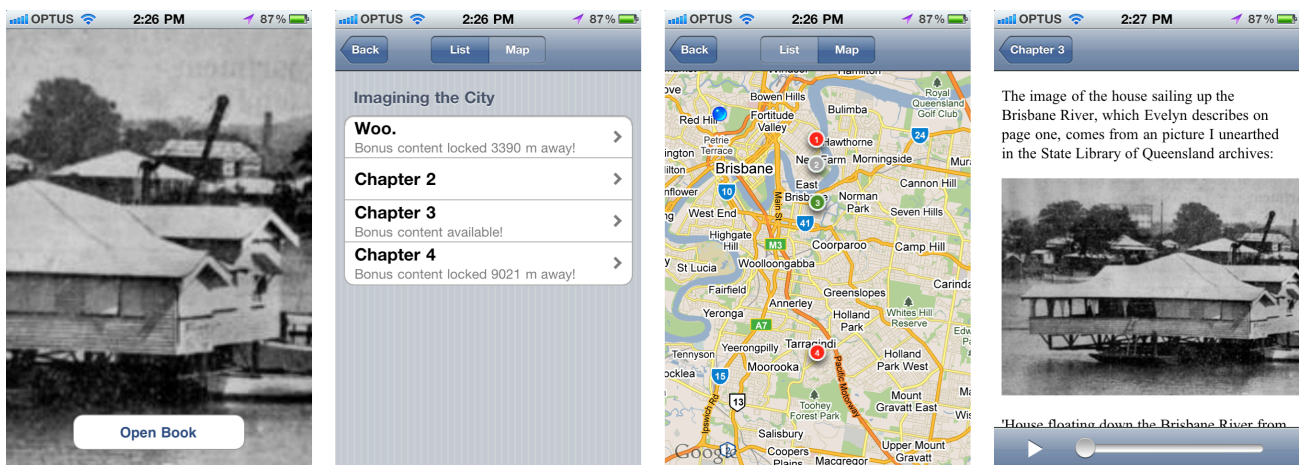


Figure 1: Screenshots of the StoryTrails iPhone application

Re-imagining research: using fiction to transform data

Ethnographers are increasingly turning to fiction as a means of re-presenting qualitative research. Robert Rinehart (1998, p. 204) states that ‘fictional ethnography combines the realist goals of academic ethnography and fiction but with an eye to both instruction and feeling.’ For example, Heather Piper and Pat Sikes (2010) use ‘composite fictions’ to represent qualitative data about sexual misconduct in the classroom in order to protect the identity of informers; Andrew Sparkes (2007) uses the short story form to represent academic experiences in an audit culture. Tobias Hecht penned *After life: An ethnographic novel with portions based on the narrations of Bruna Verissimo* (2006) after returning to Brazil where he had been conducting ethnographic research. Margaret Vickers (2002) writes stories of workplace bullying based on her experiences as a researcher and insider. Katherine Frank (2000), an ethnographer and participant observer, represented her investigation of strip clubs in America as fiction. Paul Stoller (1999) wrote the novel, *Jaguar: a Story of Africans in America*, using dialogue and internal monologue to represent contemporary

African migrant experience. Micheal Angronsino (1998) wrote *Opportunity House*, after a decade of participant observation at a community of mentally retarded adults to understand.

Many of these accounts spend a considerable amount of time justifying why fiction was chosen as a means to re-present data. Piper and Sikes (2010), for example, felt that standard strategies of pseudonyms and the disguise of personal and contextual details could not adequately protect those involved in their investigations. Fiction offered a means to mask participants while still telling their stories. Tobias Hecht (2007), on the other hand, found that, after spending hours interviewing his informant, the stories she was telling him, while plausible, were not true. Hecht felt that the literary quality of the images Bruna told him lent themselves to an imaginative retelling. However, there is relatively minimal discussion about *how* the writers went about constructing the stories. It is envisioned that the creative writers from the competition may offer some useful discussion about the question of how.

Ethnographic fiction can be a slippery term, and, if writers have not obviously identified their work as ethnographic fiction, or disclosed whether the fiction was informed by qualitative research, it is almost impossible to identify. It is common practice for writers, whether they are working in non-fiction or fiction, to draw on material such as interviews and archival material, just as an ethnographer would. However, not all fiction writers feel so tied to their material that they need to disclose their reliance on it. Some novelists, however, feel an obligation to acknowledge research as primary to the creation of their book. For example, Terry Whitebeach collaborated with her son Mick Brown to produce the novel *Bantam* (2000), based on her phone conversations and interviews with Mick. She felt that ultimately, although she was involved in the writing process, it was Mick's story. Dave Eggers wrote *What is the What: The autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng: A Novel* (2005) in the voice of Achak Deng after interviewing him for many hours. Padma

Viswanathan's *The Toss of a Lemon* (2009) is based on an oral history her Grandmother told her. All these authors have transformed research into fiction in such a way that they feel they have to acknowledge their sources.

In addition to reviewing the work of ethnographic fiction writers, this discussion will also draw on comments made from these authors to shed light on the question of how research is transformed into fiction and it is expected to further illuminate the responses from the competition winners. To avoid confusion, we will also refer to these writers' work as 'ethnographic fiction,' although the writers themselves have not adopted the term in marketing their texts. At this stage in the project, we have yet to choose winners or conduct the workshop. At present, this section offers a summary of some of the strategies writers of ethnographic fiction use when transforming data and, as a result, is broad. In a final version of this paper, we expect to intertwine this theory with the responses from the writers interviewed in the workshop, grounding the discussion in a project specific context. At this stage in the project the authors have identified several elements in transforming research into fiction: the need for an informed imagination; emphasis on emotion and subjectivity; the acceptance of complex, multiple and nuanced representations; and an understanding that the kind of truths fiction tells are 'sensual, magical and lyrical' (Rinehart, 1998, p. 204).

informed imagination.

Returning to Kitchin and Kneale's (2001, p.20. Our emphasis) discussion of cyberfiction (see p.9), they note that one of the genre's key aspects is its ability to 'provide an *informed* view of possible futures, given present trends—futures that are imaginatively constructed and free of the constraints of academic prediction making.' In writing cyberfiction, authors are constrained by the knowledge they have of the present, but can allow themselves to imagine the future in full and vivid detail. Dave Eggers (2007) describes a similar process of feeling responsible to tell a story based in reality

but needing imagination to bring the story to life. Eggers (ibid) began writing a work of nonfiction but soon discovered that:

Only with a bit of artistic licence could I imagine the thoughts in Valentino's mind the first day he left home, fleeing from the militias, never to return. Only in a novel could I imagine the look on the face of the man who rescued Valentino when he became entangled in barbed wire one black night in the middle of his journey to Ethiopia. Only in a novel could I apply what I had seen in the various regions of southern Sudan to describe the land, the light, the people.

Geraldine Brooks (2011), author of a number of historical fiction novels closely grounded in historical fact, describes this quality as 'informed imagination.'

Brooks (2011) describes her process of reading historical material until she can hear the voice of her character in her head; writing a draft; and then returning to archival material when she discovers a gap in her character's knowledge. Piper and Sikes (2009, p. 51) describe how they sat down with accounts given by family members and read over them, looking for patterns and similarities. Through doing this they were able to construct a cast of characters and storylines that 'could be used to enact experiences and perceptions.' Sparkes (2007, p. 522), however, is more experiential, stating that the process of constructing a story is 'inspired by partial happenings, fragmented memories, echoes of conversations, whispers in corridors, fleeting glimpses of myriad reflections seen through broken glass, and multiple layers of fiction and narrative imaginings.'

All these examples show that writers of ethnographic fiction draw on the idea of informed imagination. They begin the process of writing with reading, re-reading and internalising research before allowing themselves the liberty of inventing material outside the content. In addition, writers allow themselves to draw on experiences beyond the research to inform the writing process,

acknowledging that it is valid to draw on both the personal and emotional aspects of their own lives and the lives of others.

Emphasis on emotion and subjectivity

Brett Smith and Andrew Sparkes (2008, p. 24) state that fictional re-tellings of research ‘privilege the heart, the emotions and the moral centre of lived experience in ways that highlight people as relational beings and historically and culturally contingent.’ Writers working with ethnographic material, particularly interviews and observations of real people, often feel an emotional response to their research. Traditional presentation of research enforces a repression of such emotions (Angrosino 2002, p. 329). Yet as Ketele (2004, p. 25) observes, ‘my search to understand the lives of six community members helped me to understand aspects of myself, and connected me to each of them in an emotional way.’ Ketele (ibid) chose to write her experiences as poetry, and in doing so acknowledged that ‘poetry can be helpful in interpreting life experience.’ Smith and Sparkes (2008, p. 22) states that the goal of fictional re-presentations of research is to move away from abstract theorising and explaining, towards ‘evocation, intimate involvement, engagement and embodied participation with stories.’ Angrosino (2002, p. 333) adds that fiction tends towards impression, and is the attempt to evoke feeling in addition to substantive information. The emphasis on emotion and subjectivity requires writers to open themselves up to representations of the often complex and contradictory aspects of lived experience.

complex, multiple and nuanced representations.

Frank (2000, p. 483) states that, in her fiction, ‘there is a possibility of portraying a complexity of lived experience that might not always come across in a theoretical explication, even one that is concerned with elucidating the complexity of power relations and human interactions.’ Many writers of ethnographic fiction feel that traditional means of writing up data are inadequate representations

of lived experience. Anna Stephan Banks (1998, 11), for example, claims that ‘what fiction can do that no other sort of expression does is evoke the emotion of felt experience and portray values, pathos, grandeur and spirituality of the human condition.’ It is acceptable, even desirable, in fiction, to use imagination to conveying a character’s thoughts and emotions. Stoller (2002, p. 300) believes that ethnographic writing can muffle the drama of lived experience. This tendency to pull the reader away from the excitement and trauma of lived reality limits the depth of characterisation. This way of representing the world is not permissible in non-fiction or other forms of writing. These statements reveal that fiction opens up the possibility of a different kind of truth, which may, in fact, be more adequate in representing research experiences.

‘a sensual, magical, lyrical truth.’

Robert Rinehart (1998, p. 204) observes that:

Fiction comes to its truth almost incidentally, as an outgrowth of discovery of truths based on the motivations of characters, the story line (or plot), and the interaction of the elements of the story. Fiction might be based on actual events, but often, it is based on the writer’s interpretation of actual or imagined events. Yet, through fiction, the reader may viscerally inhabit a world...

Truth, in this type of writing, is not a realist narrative but rather a sensual, magical, lyrical truth. The feel of the experience-verisimilitude is what the writer is after.

In eschewing traditional academic representations, ethnographic fiction writers acknowledge that they are moving away from the truth of verisimilitude and towards a truth that is more metaphorical. Fiction is organised through thematic order rather than logical coherence (Angrosino 2002, p. 333). Fiction, unlike academic writing, does not need to arrive at definitive conclusions, and is instead an opportunity to explore a theme or idea central to the human condition. This exploration within the

constraints of fiction, rather than academic writing, may allow deeper understanding of the research at hand.

Writing can become the means of discovering data, not simply a way of revealing it. ~~Laurel~~ Richardson describes this as ‘writing as a method of inquiry.’ Richardson ~~ref~~ has observed that in using fictional writing techniques to ‘work through’ research, researchers come to new understandings about their data. ~~Margaret~~ Vickers (2010, p. 558), for example, found that during her research journey she needed another perspective; she wanted to understand the point of view of someone outside of the interviews she was conducting. So she (ibid) ‘set to writing a fictional scene to try and uncover another truth, another perspective— that of [the interviewee’s] husband—to see if I could get past my initial strongly negative response toward his reported behaviour and to show a perspective that was currently unavailable from the nonfiction and poetic texts above.’ Frank (2000 486) also observes that ‘since becoming an anthropologist, writing fiction—the process of creatively intertwining fantasy and various realities—has had the potential to restructure my ideas about the issues that I study.’ Davies (1997) also notes that ‘during our speaking/writing we were often bewildered as our ideas shot off in too many directions, demanding of us that we reconceptualise what we ‘knew’ in ways that sometimes seemed very difficult.’

Conclusion

By setting writers the task of engaging with personas in Brisbane CBD, the authors hope to encourage writers to re-conceptualise urban spaces; ethnographic fiction writers have observed that using fictional techniques to engage with research has altered their perception of the issue they are researching. Publishing stories side-by-side in an iPhone application further encourages the acceptance of multiple representations of the urban landscape, deepening both designers’ and readers’ understanding of the possibilities of interacting in an urban space. . In addition, such stories

emphasise character development and emotion, facets of urban experience Galloway (2004) and Anderson (2006) have recognised as missing from design considerations.

This project reveals the importance of imagination as a way of breaking down barriers between disciplines. The language of storytelling becomes a common language and informs the development of methodology. In this context, ethnographic fiction is a means to link imagination with design. When the project is completed, we hope to offer a contribution to knowledge about how creative writers went about transforming personas into fiction. We hope this project will encourage further creative endeavors in the field of urban design.

Fostering human talent and digital creativity outside formal education or workplace environments can favourably nurture societal and cultural values – promoting not only an innovation culture and economy, but an inclusive society (Burgess, Foth and Klæbe, 2006). We hope to use the *Imagining the City* competition as a scaffold for future research; for example, inviting readers to create their own stories in response to the already published stories or their own experiences of the city. These kinds of responses will further encourage community engagement in the discussion about how citizens interact within, and imagine, the city.

References

- Anderson, K., Burke, A. Paulous, E. and Williams, A. (2006, September). *Exurban noir*. Paper presented at Exurban Noir Conference. Retrieved from <http://drzaius.ics.uci.edu/meta/exurban-noir/ExurbanNoirProceedings.pdf#page=33>.
- Angrosino, M. (1998). *Opportunity House: Ethnographic Stories of Mental Retardation*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- Angrosino, M. (2002) Babaji and me: Reflections on fictional ethnography. In Bochner, A. P. and Ellis, C. (Eds.). *Ethnographically speaking*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- Banks, A. and S. P. Banks. (1998). The struggle over facts and fictions. In Banks, A. and Banks, S.P. (Eds.), *Fiction and social research: By ice or fire* (pp.11-29). London: Altamira Press.

- Brady, C. (2010). *Logic and the craft of fiction*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cohan, S. and Shires, L. M. (1988.) *Telling stories: a theoretical analysis of narrative fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Coverley, M. *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials, Chichester, 2007.
- Davies, B., & Dormer, S. (1997). Ruptures in the skin of silence: A collective biography. *Hecate*, 23(1), 62. <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/ehost/detail?sid=9ecc7e02-bfa9-44a8-ad49-cbc96729f975%40sessionmgr115&vid=2&hid=111&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=afh&AN=9709122771>.
- Driver, F. (1999). Chapter 22: Imagined geographies. In Cloke, P., Crang, P. and Goodwin, M (Eds.). *Introducing human geography*. London: Arnold.
- Eggers, D. (2007). It was Just Boys Walking. Retrieved from <http://www.valentinoachakdeng.org/essay.php>
- Eggers, D. 2007. *What is the what*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foth, M, Hearn, G., and Klæbe, H.. (2007). *Embedding digital narratives and new media in urban planning*. Paper presented at Digital Resources for the Humanities and Arts, 9-12 September, Dartington, South Devon, UK. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/8813/1/8813.pdf>.
- Foth, M., Stachell, C., Bilandzic, M., Hearn, G., and Shelton, D. (2012). Dramatic character development personas to tailor apartment designs for different residential lifestyles. In Foth, Marcus, Forlano, Laura, Satchell, Christine, & Gibbs, Martin (Eds.). *From social butterfly to engaged citizen: Urban informatics, social media, ubiquitous computing, and mobile technology to support citizen engagement*, Cambridge: MIT Press (In Press).
- Frank, K. (2000). "The Management of Hunger": Using Fiction in Writing Anthropology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(4), 474-488.
- Galloway, A. (2004) *Imitations of everyday life: ubiquitous computing and the city*, Cultural Studies, 18: 2, 384-408 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950238042000201572>.
- Galloway, A., Ludvigsen, M., Sundholm, H. and Munro, A. (2003). *From bovine herd to urban players: Multidisciplinary interaction for alternative city tourisms*. Workshop position paper for MUM, 10-12 December, 2003, Sweden.
- Gibson, R. (2005). Imagination and the historical impulse in response to a past full of disappearance, *Centre for public Culture and Ideas- Public Lecture*. Griffith University
- Grenville, K. (1990). *The writing book: a workbook for fiction writers*. New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.

- Hecht, T. *After life: An ethnographic novel with portions based on the narrations of Bruna Verissimo*. Duke University Press, London, 2006.
- Hecht, T. (2007). A case for ethnographic fiction. *Anthropology News*, 48(2), 17-18. doi: 10.1525/an.2007.48.2.17
- Hearn, G., Tacchi, J., Foth, M., and Lennie, J. *Action research and new media*. Hampton Press, Cresskill, 2009.
- Hoffman, M.J. and Murphy, P.D. (Eds.). (2007). *Essentials of a theory of fiction*. United States of America: Duke University Press.
- Kitchin, R. and Kneale, J. (2001). Science fiction or future fact? Exploring imaginative geographies of the new millennium. *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (1), 19-35.
- Ketelle, D. (2004). Poetry and lived experience: Poetic interpretation and reflection used to understand self and other. *Qualitative Research*, 4(2), 19-26.
- Klaebe, H., Foth, M., Burgess, J., & Bilandzic, M. (2007). Digital storytelling and history lines: Community engagement in a master-planned development. Paper presented at 13th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia (VSMM'07), Sep 23-26, Brisbane. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/8985/>
- Lothe, J. (2000). *Narrative in fiction and film*. United States: Oxford University Press.
- Mantel, H. (1993). Growing a tale. In Boylan, C. (Ed.). *The agony and the ego: the act and strategy of fiction writing explored*. London: Penguin.
- Piper, H., and Sikes, P. (2010). All Teachers are Vulnerable but Especially Gay Teachers: Using Composite Fictions to Protect Participants in Pupil-Teacher Sex related Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(7), 566-574.
- Preston, P. and Simpson-Houseley, P. Writing the city. In Eds. Watson, S. and Bridge, G.. *The Blackwell city reader*. Wiley: Blackwell, New York, 2010.
- Richardson, L., and Adams St. Pierre, E. (2005). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 959-978). London: Sage Publications.
- Ricketson, M. (2010). The practice of book-length journalism: Reframing the debate. <http://www.canberra.edu.au/anzca2010/attachments/pdf/Practice-of-book-length-journalism.pdf>.

- Ridanpää, J. (2007). Laughing at northernness: postcolonialism and metafictional irony in the imaginative geography. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(6), 907 - 928.
- Rinehart, R. (1998). Fictional Methods in Ethnography: Believability, Specks of Glass, and Chekhov. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(2), 200-224.
- Reason, P., and Bradbury, H. *Handbook of action research*. Sage, London, 2001
- Sparkes, A. C. (2007). Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture: a story seeking consideration. *Qualitative Research*, 7(4), 521-550. doi: 10.1177/1468794107082306
- Stoller, P. (2002). 'The Griot's many burdens: Fiction's many truths.' In Bochner, A. P. and Ellis, C. *Ethnographically speaking*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2008). Narrative and its potential contribution to disability studies. *Disability & Society*, 23(1), 17 - 28.
- Sikes, P. and Piper, H. (2010). *Researching sex and lies in the classroom: Allegations of sexual misconduct in schools*. New York: Routledge.
- Vickers, M. H. (2002). Researchers as Storytellers: Writing on the Edge—And Without a Safety Net. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 608.
- Viswanath, P. (2009). *The toss of the lemon*. Canada: Random House.
- Wallace, M. 1986. *Recent theories of narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Wiesner, Kevin, Foth, Marcus, & Bilandzic, Mark (2009) Unleashing creative writers : situated engagement with mobile narratives. In Kjeldskov, Jesper, Paay, Jeni, & Viller, Stephen (Eds.) *OZCHI 2009 Proceedings : Design: Open 24/7*, ACM Digital Library, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Whitebeach, T. (2010) Place and People: Stories by and of Unemployed Youth in a Small Island Community. *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 32(1), 48-51.

ⁱ The full information pack and entry form is available here: <http://www.urbaninformatics.net/2011/04/12/imagining-the-city-brisbane-short-story-competition/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.urbaninformatics.net/people/>